

ABSTRACT

Teacher Attrition and Staff Turnover: a study of four parishes in eastern Jamaica.

Annette Henriques-Piper

The purpose of this investigation was to identify the factors which contribute to attrition and turnover among teachers in Jamaican schools, with specific reference to eastern Jamaica, and to suggest strategies that may be used to control the phenomena.

A random sample of eighty-eight practising teachers drawn from twelve schools in St. Thomas and the corporate area, and a convenient sample of twenty-three ex-teachers who worked in these schools were used in the exercise. Data were analysed according to the research questions being answered, and the categories used in the analysis were personal and professional factors, school-related factors, and societal factors. Frequency counts and mean scores were calculated, and 't' tests were carried out with the results indicating that there was no significant difference between the perceptions of the groups on the factors which contribute to teacher attrition and staff turnover.

The results of the study indicated that:

1. There were variations in the rates of attrition and turnover between and among different types of schools, but primary schools, shift schools, urban schools, and large schools seemed to retain their staff for longer periods than secondary schools, regular day schools, rural schools, and small schools.
2. Age, qualification, training and experience do not necessarily determine attrition and turnover rates. Teachers leave the system at different ages, and different stages of their career. That is, with regard to qualification, the largest group of practising teachers in the sample were university graduates; and only about 5% of the ex-teachers had not held any senior positions in a school prior to their leaving the system. There was a greater percentage of university graduates among the sample of practising teachers, and even individuals who have had up to fourteen years of experience and/or held senior management positions in schools have left the system.
3. School-related factors such as class size, workload, students' attitude and performance, lack of parental support, principal's leadership style, the limited scope for professional growth and development, and the inadequacy of salaries contribute most to teacher attrition.

Societal factors like the status of the teaching profession, the relationship between schools and their surrounding communities, and society's attitude toward education and teachers were the next most important contributing factors. Teachers are dissatisfied with the lack of facilities and equipment, as well as the cramped space and substandard plants in which many of them have to operate, and will leave for equal paying jobs as long as the infrastructure and general conditions are comfortable.

4. Teachers remain in specific schools and/or the profession mainly because of :

- [i] The convenience of the working hours and location of the school for their family life;
- [ii] principals' leadership style;
- [iii] provision made by schools for living accommodation and staff welfare;
- [iv] parental and community support received by schools.

The implication of these results and suggestions made by the sample have led to the following recommendations:

1. Teachers should be provided with fringe benefits similar to those offered to workers in the private sector since this is where many ex-teachers opt to seek employment. Such benefits could be scholarships

for teachers and/or their children, free education for the children of teachers, daily transportation to and from work for teachers, mortgages at special reduced rates, and other financial assistance similar to those offered to workers in the private sector. Special compensation should be given to teachers of students who excel, those with special skills, and those who work outside of the corporate area.

2. Working conditions in schools need to be improved. This should be done with the assistance of the private sector through financing and/or the release of workers, especially ex-teachers, to assist in the schools. For example, the sector could provide additional classrooms, furniture, and equipment and release workers to act as resource persons and support staff. These efforts could greatly improve the conditions under which teachers work, and/or cut back on the number of different roles one teacher has to assume each day on the job. The Ministry of Education could develop and implement a policy whereby clusters of schools are assigned trained personnel in the form of nurses, guidance counsellors, and psychiatrists to cut back on the number of different roles any one teacher has to assume each day on the job.
3. The Ministry of Education Youth and Culture should make it mandatory for all principals to be formally trained in management and supervision,

as this may assist them in the execution of their roles as managers, administrators and supervisors in the schools should make it mandatory for all principals to be formally trained in management and supervision, and they should not be permanently appointed to these positions until they have displayed effectiveness and competence. These will be determined by set criteria such as staff turnover, student performance, organizational climate, and job satisfaction among staff as these are affected by administrative strategies.

4. There should be a relocation and/or expansion of social services to rural areas. This should include not only educational facilities but business and industry to provide services and employment for families in general, as this will impact on demographic stability and in turn staff turnover and attrition among teachers in schools.